

Emergency Preparedness

Does Your Club Have a Plan?

The past year has brought with it an unexpected string of extreme weather, including one of the deadliest tornado seasons in recent memory, a freak earthquake that spanned the eastern seaboard, and, most recently, devastating thunderstorms that tore their way through the nation's capital. With hurricane season now upon us, and more mundane emergencies, such as fires, equipment malfunctions and power outages, that can happen any time, clubs should always be prepared to handle unexpected emergency situations.

The Institute for Business and Home Safety reports that approximately one quarter of businesses do not reopen after they experience a major disaster. But, proper planning can help your club quickly respond to emergencies, effectively recover from the situation and rapidly reopen for business—helping to ensure the safety of both club members and staff while minimizing club downtime.

Knowledge is Power

A recent survey by Staples.com about disaster planning and preparedness indicated that, while almost 50 percent of the office managers polled reported that they were in charge of safety-related planning for their office, only half of the office workers surveyed report having either never participated in safety drills or having only done so every few years. Furthermore, though 70 percent of office managers indicated that their companies have emergency communication plans, almost 50 percent of employees indicated that they were either unsure that their companies had an emergency plan or did not believe that such a plan existed at all.



Even small emergencies can trigger panicked responses from both club members and staff, so it's important that club staff know that an emergency plan is in place to help control the situation. Having a set of learned procedures to fall back on can help staff control the situation and react accordingly. Distributing a set of emergency procedures to club staff and conducting frequent drills ensures that club employees are prepared to respond to emergency situations and can help minimize risk. The more rapid a club's emergency response, the sooner the club can begin planning for recovery and reopen its doors.

Planning for Disaster

If your club hasn't updated its current emergency plan in a while, there are some simple steps that your club can follow to develop an effective emergency response plan.

Assign a Planning Team

Though it's often the general manager's job to head up disaster planning, working with a team to develop a response plan provides added insight to policies and procedures best suited for all areas of club operations. Furthermore, when more people are involved in the process, it increases the amount of time that the team can collectively invest, increases the visibility of the planning process, and reinforces the importance of emergency response.

Set Development Parameters Disaster planning should be approached like any other important club project, and the team assigned to create the plan should establish an overarching mission, goals for the emergency response process, and a clear timeline for completion. Since it's important that the club have specific supplies on hand for emergencies and that club employees be informed of procedures, the team should also have a clear budget to provide for these necessities.

Assess the Club's Current Plan

Before starting on an entirely new plan, the team should assess the club's current procedures and materials, including:

- Evacuation plans
- Fire protection plans
- Safety and health programs
- Environmental policies
- Security procedures
- Insurance programs
- Finance and purchasing procedures
- Club closing policies
- Employee manuals
- Hazardous materials plans
- Process safety assessments
- Risk management plans
- Capital improvement programs
- Mutual aid agreements

Research Disasters and Appropriate Responses

Clubs can conduct a thorough risk analysis, including assessments of the club's vulnerability, possible kinds of emergencies, probability estimates, and the potential impacts of such emergencies on employees, members, the business and the club property, to better understand how the club might be affected by disasters and then determine how best to respond. There are a number of resources that clubs can look to for additional information, since each location and situation is unique. Clubs should look to the following sources for additional information about emergency responses and disasters in their area:

- Community emergency management office
- Mayor or Community Administrator's office
- Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)
- Fire Department
- Police Department
- Emergency Medical Services organizations
- American Red Cross
- National Weather Service
- Public Works Department
- Planning Commission
- Telephone companies
- Electric utilities

- Neighboring businesses

Clubs should also be sure to identify applicable federal, state and local regulations, including:

- Occupational safety and health regulations
- Environmental regulations
- Fire codes
- Seismic safety codes
- Transportation regulations
- Zoning regulations
- Corporate policies

Develop an Emergency Management Plan

Once clubs better understand the risk of disasters and how those emergencies might affect them, they can follow this process to help them develop a sound and effective plan:

1. Identify Challenges and Prioritize Activities – Set short-term goals for the plan’s development and determine how to address high-risk areas and vulnerabilities identified during the risk analysis.
2. Write the Plan – Assign each team member one or more sections of the plan to write, so that each team-member can focus on select areas of information, ensuring a thorough and comprehensive assessment.
3. Coordinate with Outside Organizations – Inform appropriate government and local authorities that the club is creating a safety management plan; determine state and local requirements for disaster and emergency reporting and incorporate them into the plan; determine and establish protocol for responses from outside agencies, including access points and procedures; and, establish protocol for employee site access.
4. Review, Conduct Mock Training and Revise – Once written, the team should then review the plan, conduct a sample training exercise, and make the necessary revisions to the plan and training procedures.
5. Seek Final Approval – Brief the board and have the final version of the plan approved.
6. Establish a Training Schedule – Develop a training schedule for all employees.
7. Distribute the Plan – Place printed versions of the plan in three-ring binders to be distributed to all employees; require employee signatures upon receipt of the plan; inform employees of key plan elements and training schedule; and, ensure key employees have additional copies at home or in alternate locations in case of emergencies.

Proper preparation is a key element of success, and having a clear plan in place in case of emergency can help protect your club and its members and employees when disaster strikes.

Additional information on emergency preparedness can also be found through the Federal Emergency Management Agency at fema.gov.